

## The Story of 4-H Wildlife and Fisheries Volunteer Leader, Ricky Linex



My involvement with 4-H began through a desire shared with my sons to be outdoors doing things together. My wife and I had heard of a shooting sports program where 4-H youngsters enjoyed target practice with rifle and shotgun. This seemed to be an exciting way to further our family's interest and hone skills already being developed. A young assistant county agent, Robert Scott, set the wheels in motion to form a 4-H club for youth with an interest in outdoor education and shooting sports. The Taylor

County 4-H Field and Stream Club was formed in the fall of 1993. I served as club manager that first year and did so until we relocated to Weatherford TX in 2003. Initial training at a 4-H Shooting Sports Workshop allowed me to discover a world of fun and a common ground to share with my sons, their friends, and other youth in the state.

Field and Stream Club has become a family affair with my wife's interest just short of attending a coach's workshop, but she too is hooked. The club's focus has expanded to include many topics related to wildlife, but shooting sports is still the core interest of the members. We have shot 3-position Smallbore rifle, light rifle, Smallbore silhouette, trap, skeet, International trap, and skeet and sporting clays. We have 4 families that travel to district shoots, often over 300 miles one way to encourage their kids in competition. It is a pleasure to watch shy beginners become polished young gunners filled with confidence in their abilities.

From a magazine article, we learned about a program named YHEC, which stands for Youth Hunter Education Challenge. We contacted the state coordinator, received study materials, and initiated a team for the state competition. This program extended into all areas of wildlife, fisheries, and shooting sports. It appraised the youth with a hunter skills trail and measured their orienteering skills. Preparing for these multilevel skills took us from the archery range to wildlife identification labs. At the first YHEC competition one of the youngsters emerged as the High Overall Junior. This inspired me to establish more outdoor learning activities into our club programs. We have incorporated Extension Service Wildlife Specialists, Game Wardens, Wildlife Biologists and Naturalists to create programs that entertain as well as educate about our outdoor treasures.



My role as a Hunter Education Instructor came about as the result of a trade made with the Scoutmaster of the Chisholm Trail Council. I had approached him to request using the Smallbore rifle range at Camp Tonkawa. This cagey old scoutmaster said he sure needed someone to teach hunter education during the evenings at summer camp, so we came to an agreement that I would become certified to teach Hunter Ed. and 4-H could use the rifle range. This uncovered another passion in assisting young people, and some not so young, to be safe when handling firearms and hunting. These classes provide the perfect recruiting tool to bring new youth into 4-H and the wildlife and fisheries project.



I have been blessed that I can utilize knowledge acquired from my vocation to encourage others who love the outdoors. As a certified wildlife biologist, I collaborate with landowners to improve the management of their rangeland areas by introducing grazing principles into their operations. I recently was promoted to Zone Biologist for 51 North Central Texas counties. My experiences with managing natural resources the past 22 years prepared me to assist with another life changing, The Texas Brigades. These are wildlife leadership camps that use quail, deer, and bass to educate high school age youth in wildlife conservation. They learn just about everything regarding the target species of their camp as well as including leadership training, public speaking, critical thinking, and a passion for the great outdoors. I know that the adult volunteers get as much enjoyment out of the 5 days as the kids do. It is long hours and little sleep, but extremely rewarding when the “cadets” begin to work together and unify their “coveys”. They achieve specific results as they accomplish preset camp goals. This is youth development at its best.

I have observed junior and teen leaders spread their wings and become tomorrow’s young men and women serving in their communities. 4-H has molded them into outstanding citizens. Our oldest son received the 4-H Gold Star Award and is a treasure to his mom and myself. He is a positive role model for his younger brother and his friends. The 4-H program has given me the greatest gift of all, a close friendship with both my sons. I have been energized by their desires and dreams. Being allowed to be a part of nurturing those dreams, whether it is a first deer or an Olympic medal, has been the finest honor.

My goals for the future include continuing to promote 4-H and strengthening youth programs. I would like to encourage more parents to become adult volunteer leaders in different project areas. I plan to continue volunteering in 4-H at all levels. This year I will pass the torch as chairman of the state shooting sports project team, but will serve in other aspects. We are all stewards of these 4-H programs. Passing that legacy of educating and understanding our natural resources has become increasingly important. Many in the youngest generations are getting further away from the soil and water and the wild things that live there. The knowledge and opportunity 4-H offers allows youth to gain greater appreciation for wildlife and the outdoors. This will ensure that future generations will be equipped to love the sound of the wind, the smell of the campfire and the call of the coyote in the distance.

